

THE NURAGIC SANCTUARY
OF SANTA CRISTINA

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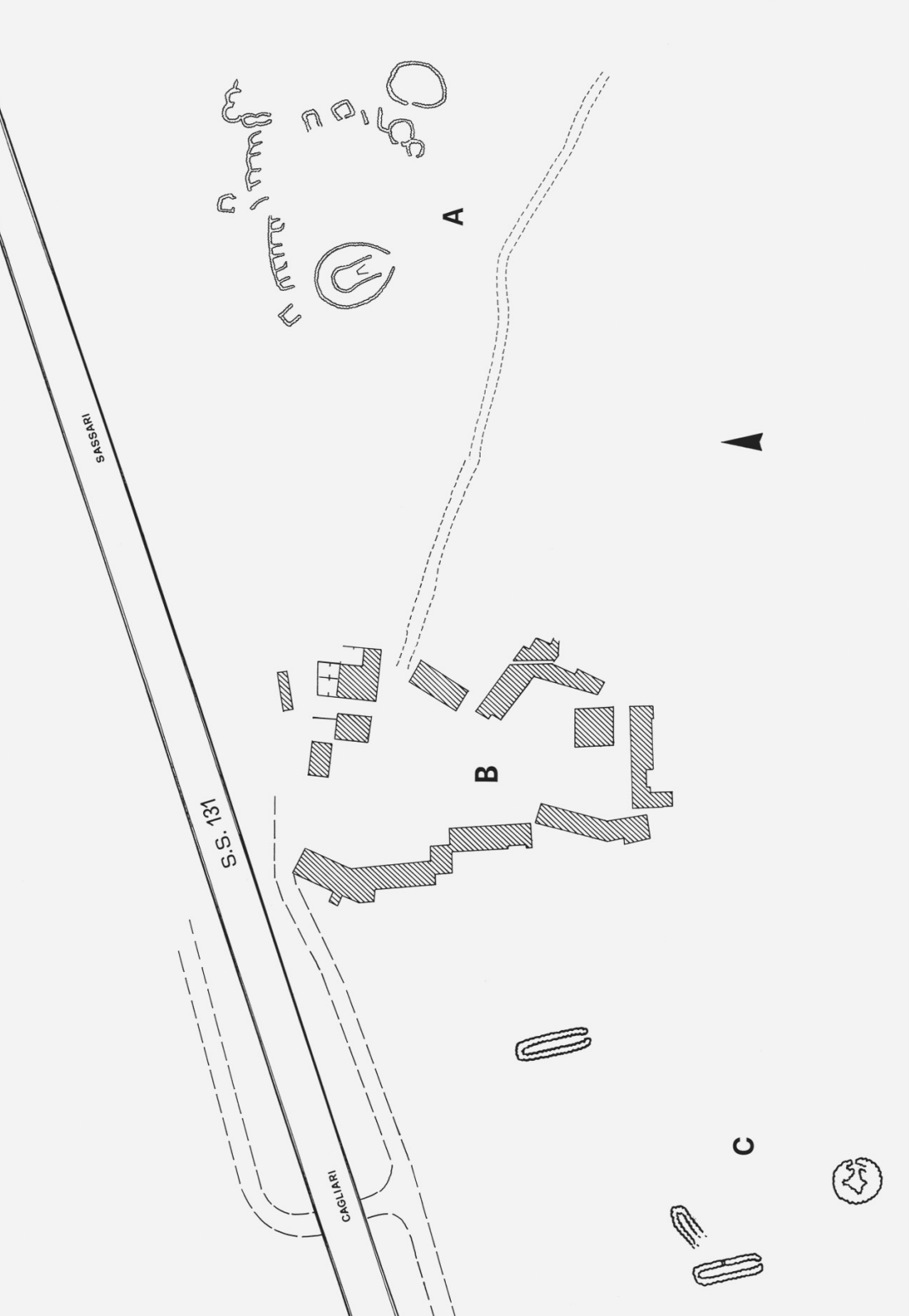
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SARDINIA

32

Guide books and Itineraries

THE NURAGIC SANCTUARY
of SANTA CRISTINA
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Carlo Delfino editore



The Nuragic Sanctuary of Santa Cristina

The archaeological site of Santa Cristina is situated about 4 km south of the village of Paulilatino, at km 115 of the main road ss131 Sassari-Cagliari; making it easily accessible from both directions.

The location is named after the small rural church of Santa Cristina, which is central to the small houses - the so called “muristenes” or “cumbessias” - used by the village people during religious celebrations.

Celebrations in honour of Santa Cristina on the second Sunday in May, and in honour of the Archangel Gabriel on the fourth Sunday in October.

The archaeological complex consists of two sections: the first includes the nuragic sanctuary, the well temple with its connected structures (the meetings hut with surrounding wall, tabernae, huts); and about 100 meters south-west from the first section there is a small single towered nuraghe, with some elongated huts of unknown age and function.

The archaeological site covers a hectare of surface within a park of 14 hectares.

History of the studies and searches

The first mention of the Well Temple of Santa Cristina is found, probably in the Voyage (1840) by Lamarmora. Referring to the Nuraghe Funtana Padenti in Baccai (Lanusei), Lamarmora wrote «built with rough stone, not like a small well near by, funnel shaped and built with finely finished volcanic stones, which had been put together with care...». In the notes Lamarmora compared it to the Well of Santa Cristina, he wrote «a similar Well Temple is situated by the church of Santa Cristina, not too distant from Paulilatino; it was partly obstructed and full of water».

Another brief mention is found in the Casalis Dictionary, under the voice of “Paulilatino”, Angius (1846) wrote «Two miles from the village there is the church of Santa Cristina. By the church there is a singular funnel shaped construction, accessible through the hole and the

cone shaped stairs, made of well refined stones, that also make up the wall around the staircase, which looks like a tilted funnel. Among the people who descended into the Well Temple, nobody could explain the use of the construction».

In 1857, Giovanni Spano, who is the recognised leader of Sardinian Archaeology, took a particular interest on the Well Temple of Santa Cristina and drew the first graphic map of the monument. Vincenzo Crespi realised the design which included the plan, a side section and a prospective view of the staircase. Describing the monument, Spano wrote «The work is cyclopean; it has been built with big volcanic black stones, from a local cave, and without cement in the same manner as nuragic constructions. The access is through an underground passage, with a perpendicular vaulted roof made with overlapping stones that create overlaying layers. From top to bottom it is over 4 meters high. A first layer of massive stones rests on the rounded wide base, on that first layer there is a second smaller layer and so on to the top with a total of 10 layers narrowing towards the top to form a shape of a cone cut short and the mouth of an ordinary well; a man at the bottom would not be able to climb out because the shape of the stones form an upside down staircase».

After this confusing description, Spano tried to explain the possible function of the unique construction, although difficult to understand due to the presence of debris at the time: «whoever takes a look at the Nuraghi, will understand that they are from the same period as the Well Temple, although the former also shows a construction technique that used to be employed by the Egyptians. It was man's first attempt to build vaults, an idea probably taken by the oval shape typical of Nuraghi. Therefore this work belongs to the first oriental populations that moved to Sardinia. It is very easy to guess its purpose is related to a prison system particularly if we consider the prison constructions typical of the Romans and the Etruscans. These consisted in a well, or a hole in the ground, with a vaulted ceiling and a mere opening at the top to let the light through...this suggestion is also confirmed by the belief that it had been the prison where the tyrant had placed the Saint, and where the former had been tortured... It could not have been a well, firstly because there was a fountain near by, which is never missing from the edges of areas with Nuraghes; and second, the absence of cement would make it

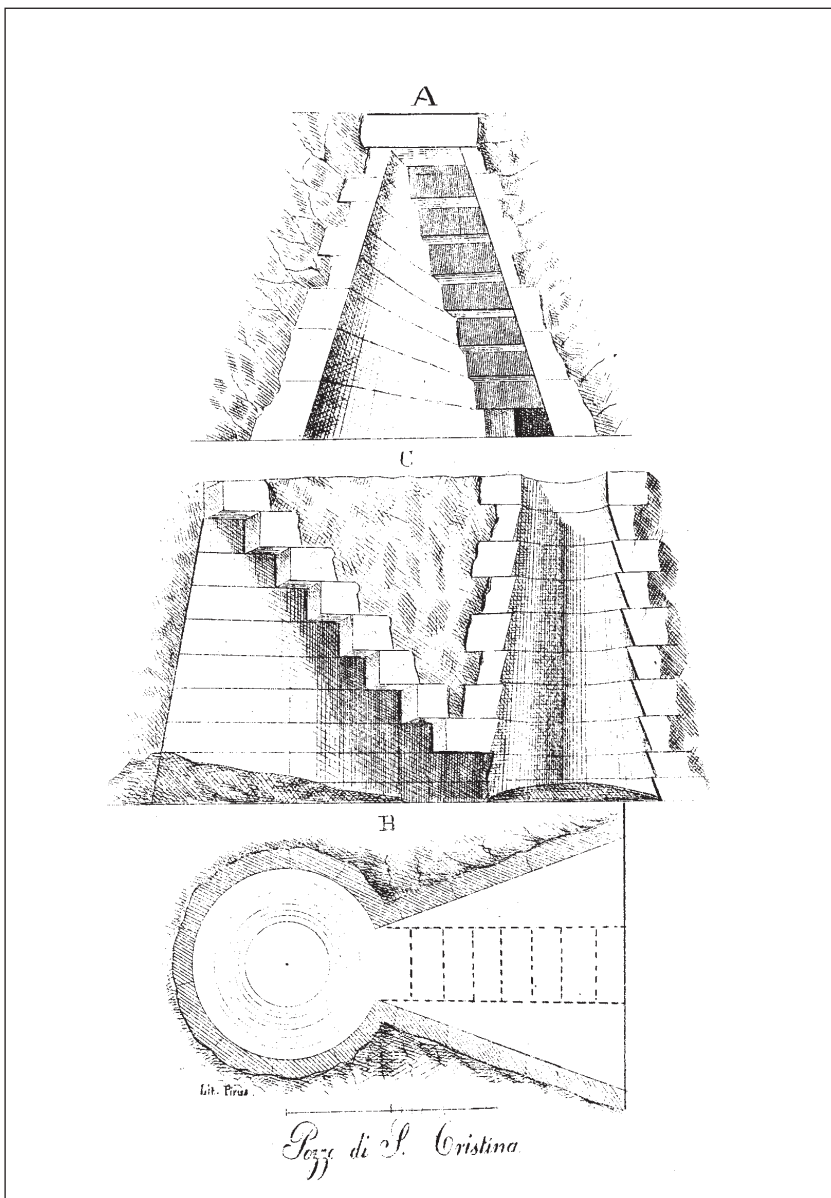


Fig. 1. The well temple of Santa Cristina in the survey by Spano (1857).

CARTA NUBAGOLRAFICA
del Comune di Paulilatino contenente i disegni dei principali Nuraghi



Fig. 2. Archaeological map of the Paulilatino area by Spano (1867).

impossible for the structure to stand the water volume. Also the presence of the underground staircase makes it unlikely that it functioned as a well».

Spano attributed the origins of the well temple to the nuragic period, but due to a fountain in close proximity and the absence of cement in the construction he denied any water use and hypothesised it was used as a prison!

Several years later, Lamarmora, in the “Itineraire” (1860), writing about the well of Funtana Patendi Bacca in Lanusei made a reference to the monument in Paulilatino: «In the surroundings of Paulilatino, apart from many Nuraghi, there is also the Well Temple of Santa Cristina, near the homonymous church. It is a kind of underground well, cone shaped, wide at the base and narrow at the top. It has been built with large basaltic stones, and the access is through an underground passage that has been built in the same manner, with finely finished large stones that have been placed in groups; the construction of the cone is similar to the first attempts at vault design, making it impossible to climb up from the bottom».

The Sardinian Archaeological Bulletin published the drawings and the description by Spano: «he compares it to the old prisons described by Jeremy, although I believe it dates back to before the Roman age, therefore it would be an underground passage similar to the ruins in Lanusei. I also see some similarities with the famous underground passage in Mycenae in Greece, as described and illustrated by Giacomo Stuart».

Lamarmora compared the monument in Lanusei with the well temple of Santa Cristina, comparing both to a tilted funnel. Also by Lamarmora are the suppositions about a possible ritual use. In 1847, after the discovering of conic stones with a base designed to hold little bronze statues, Lamarmora connected it to the one in Albini; this observation would lead us to believe the Well Temple dated back to the first colonisations.

Spano did not reconsider his position. In the map about the nuragic area in Paulilatino, that was published in connection with the 3rd edition of “Memorie sopra i nuraghi di Sardegna” in 1867, the plan of the well temple of Santa Cristina is reported with the number 87; the caption says: «unique monument». His position remained the same in later publications, such as “Itinerario tradotto e compendiato” in 1868 and

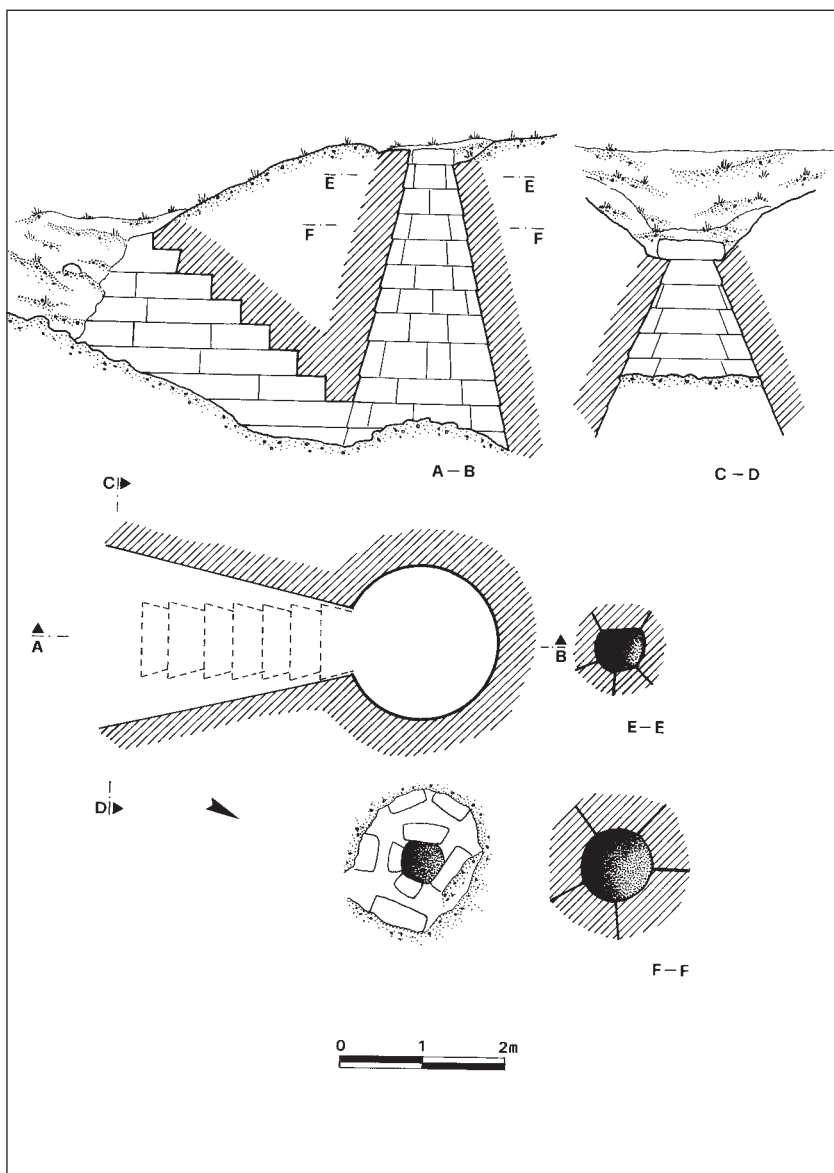


Fig. 3. *The well temple of Santa Cristina in the survey by Newton (Mackenzie 1913).*



Fig. 4. *Photo of the well temple of Santa Cristina at the end of 1800's by Peter Paul Mackey.*

“Emendamenti ed aggiunte agli Itinerari” in 1874.

The first two photographic images of the monument date back to 1898-1899, thanks to the Dominican priest Peter Paul Mackay. They show the Well Temple surrounded by weeds, which obstruct the sight permitting only a partial view of the entrance to the stairs.

In 1900, Domenico Lovisato published a document about the discovery of two well temples in Matzani-Villacidro, where he compared them to the “favisse” of the Roman Well Temple in Golfo Aranci (Putu de Milis) discovered in 1889, and with the one in Santa Cristina. Apart from rough fragments dating back to the nuragic period, a roman coin, a finely worked statue of small dimensions, inside had been found the little bronze statue known as “barbetta” and a bronze bowl. According to Lovisato, the wells in Matzanni were only big store rooms that contained objects of all sorts and of different age, similar to the “favissa” of the Campidoglio, dating back to the Carthaginian Period.

It is astonishing that in “Monumenti primitivi della Sardegna”, the first systematic and complete work on Sardinian ancient history published in 1901, Giovanni Pinza, an archaeologist with a palaeontologist background, did not mention either of the monuments listed so far!

In 1904, A. Mayr, impressed with the analogies with the Mycenaean tholoi, interpreted Santa Cristina as a real dome vault tomb.

It was Antonio Caramelli, the great archaeologist of the early 1900's, that clarified the use of the well temples that had been brought to light all over the island. The excavation of the nuragic sanctuary of Santa Vittoria in Serri, and especially the exploration of the well temple, in 1909, convinced him that it was a monument for the worship of water. The intuitions of Lamarmora and Lovisato are confirmed by Taramelli's study, which is based upon the analysis of the structures and the materials that had been found. The researches around the sanctuary in Serri started to make clear the purpose of the constructions of that same type, growing in numbers and marked by a specific architectonic system; also distinguished by the presence of precious objects. Their origins dated back clearly to the Nuragic Age and their use was connected to the worship of water.

In the memories of Nuraghe Lugherras in Paulilatino, in 1910, Taramelli wrote: «Considering recent studies, the well of Santa

Cristina must be regarded as a sacred well similar to the one in S. Vittoria Serri».

It must be mentioned that Giovanni Petazzoni took part in the second excavation of Serri, as a young inspector of the Pigorini Museum in Rome, who would become one of the greatest experts of religious studies. Thanks to that experience Petazzoni published a book about the religions of the early Sardinian populations, titled "Religione Primitiva della Sardegna (Early Sardinian Religion), 1912. In the work, which is still valued, Petazzoni compared the worship of water with cases outside Sardinia. He defended the arguments of Taramelli, soon joined in 1910 by L.A. Milani, the director of the Archaeological Museum in Florence.

There was not a lack of opposing relevant theories, especially in the early years; Ettore Pais (1910) attributed the structure of the well in Serri to the period of Carthaginian rule; while several years later in 1920 Giovanni Pinza openly challenged Taramelli's view, by stating the same monument was contemporary to an earlier church of Santa Vittoria.

Duncan Mackenzie, a Scottish archaeologist and main collaborator of A.Evans in the excavation of Crosso, published some important works on Sardinia's megalithic monuments; in 1913 he published a new and more precise survey of the well temple and a plan of the "nuraghe" and the elongated huts.

It is astonishing that the well of Santa Cristina had not captured Taramelli's interest, who had brought to light 14 well temples, eight of which he had excavated himself.

In 1913 Taramelli wrote about a bronze statue found in the area of Santa Cristina by a certain Ciriaco Putzolu. The exact details of its source were not available, therefore the provenance from the well temple is only a hypothesis.

The first excavations and restoring of the nuragic structures did not start until 1953; the work followed in 1967-73 and 1977-73 by E.Atzeni. More excavations of the area have been directed by P. Bernardini between 1989-1990; the restoring and developing of the archaeological complex are still in progress.

Since then the well temple of Santa Cristina has been mentioned in a vast list of publications, creating interest not only in the refined architecture of the structure but also in its age.

Giovanni Lilliu, the most important of Sardinian archaeologists, describes the monument as follows: «the well of Santa Cristina is regal; it represents the apex of architecture for well temples. The balance of its proportions, the precision and refinement of the interiors make it hard to believe it dates back to around 1000 B.C. and that it is an expression of nuragic art, before the presence of prestigious ancient populations on the island».

Among the others, Cesare Brandi also admired the monument making unlikely comparisons: «in this place everything is amazing, compared to the stones and the elegance of the construction even the tomb of Atreo in Mycenae seems a smaller work; therefore it would be unthinkable to believe that the good nuragic people used an Achaean architect».

An astro-archaeological interpretation of the monument is also worth a mention. M.Cavedon, taking a theory belonging to the astronome G.Romano, published a drawing (plan and side section) in the *Corriere della Sera* on 16th of June 1992, with the following caption: «The structure was used as an observatory of the maximum lunar declination towards the end of December and the beginning of January; at this point the moon's reflection was in the water. During the vernal and autumnal equinoxes the sun light reflected all over the staircase and it reached the water». It's a shame that whoever wrote the article based the theory on the actual state of the structure, ignoring the fact that the opening over the room was closed at the origins and there was a part of the monument over it that had been destroyed!!

We must hypothesise that the extended part of the monument had been built with fashioned stones put together with care, - like for example the sacred source of Su Tempiesu in Orune -; after the demolition of that part, we can only assume that the well refined stones had been reused in other constructions.

Regarding the stratigraphic research on the sanctuary, the results of the excavation are not yet available. The materials found during the excavation are also unavailable, with the exception of 4 Phoenician little statues found on the Temple's steps: a simple arched fibula and a leach fibula, some anthropomorphic figures made of clay. In the area connected to the well, they found several figurative terracotta objects, necklace's fragments, embalming fragments made of a



Fig. 5. *The sacred spring of Su Tempiesu in Orune before restoration.*

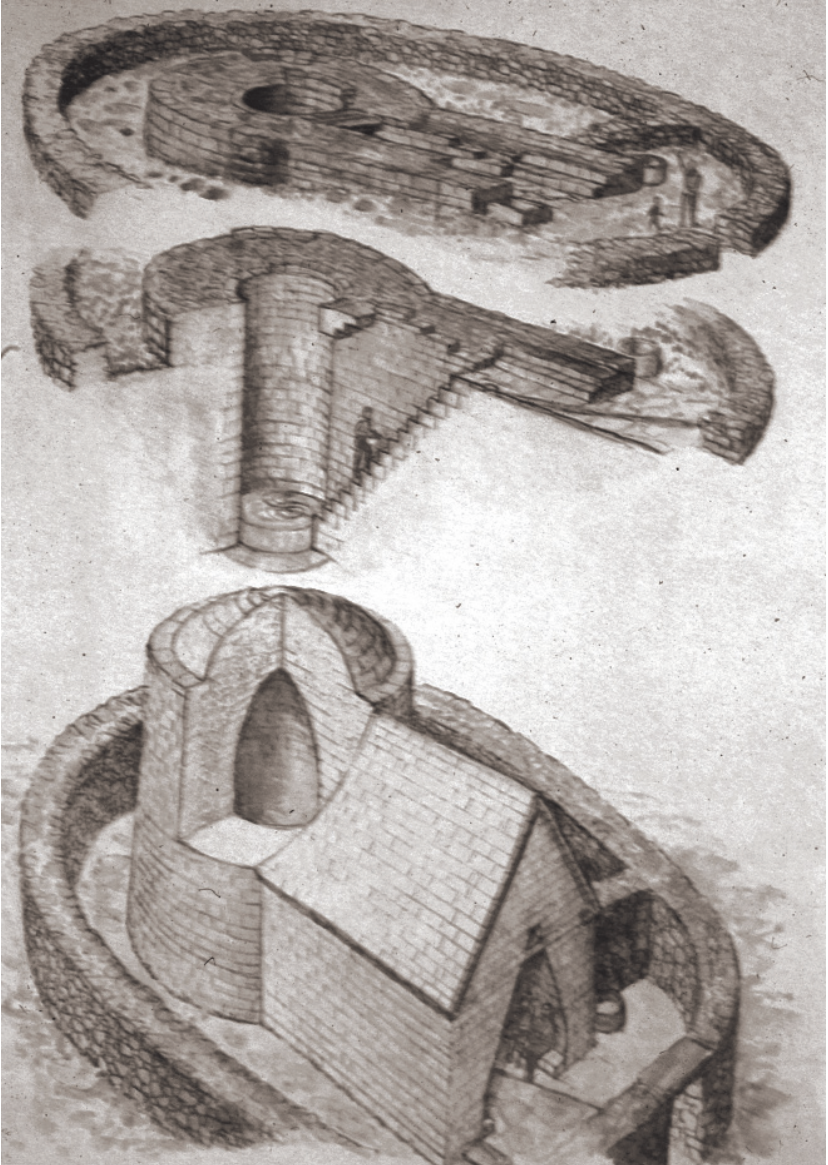


Fig. 6. *Hypothesis of a reconstruction of a well temple. Top, Santa Vittoria of Serri as it stands; bottom, hypothesis of reconstruction.*



Fig. 7.
*Phoenician
bronze statue
decorated with
pictures found in
the well temple of
Santa Cristina.*

vitreous paste connected to the late-republican period.

The searches in some parts of the village headed by Paolo Bernardini, brought to light the following material: vases, narrow necked jugs, a salt-cellar like vase, a boat shaped lamp, a bronze bar, an iron piece, etc.

On the basis of the notions available so far, the Well Temple of Santa Cristina dates back to the XI century B.C.



Fig. 8. *Little statue made of clay that was found in well temple of Santa Cristina.*

North-East Sector (A)

The archaeological complex of Santa Cristina is made of two sections that are separated by the Church with its conglomerate of *cumbessias* or *muristenes*.

The north-oriental side, the most studied part, comprises the sanctuary, the well temple, the “Meeting hut”, an ample perimeter wall and a series of surroundings with a curvilinear profile and others square shaped and terraced.

The Well Temple

The well temple follows the planimetric scheme of the temple monuments of the Nuragic Age: vestibule, staircase leading down to the room underground that keeps the spring water.

Unfortunately, of the monuments there is only the underground part left, while of the raised part there is only a profile of the plan, which doesn't seem to reflect entirely the original design. The constructions over ground are limited to the external wall, a keyhole shaped construction that surrounds the rectangular vestibule and the drum of the well; the side seats against the wall refer to a later period. The whole area is within an elliptical enclosure wall (m 26 x 20) that has a coaxial entrance with the one to the vestibule and it separates the well temple from the rest of the sanctuary.

The staircase area presents a trapezoidal shape in both the plan and the section; it opens fanwise with a width of 3.47 m at ground level and it goes narrowing gradually to the last step (m 1.40), for a total depth of 6.50 m. The staircase comprises 25 steps (depth cm 28.5/31; height cm 24/25) and is covered by a ceiling resembling an upside down staircase!

The naos has a circular base (diameter m 2.54); it is 6.90 m high and it rises with a gradual narrowing of the side walls towards the top to form a vault effect: the last stone is missing, forming a hole at ground level with a diameter of 0.33 m. In the middle of the floor there is a decanting round basin of 0.50 m deep.

The masonry of the stairs is made with fashioned stones placed with great precision, this type of construction is known as “isodomo”.

It is made with basaltic blocks, well finished and facing sideways, placed in horizontal rows with the lower voussoir overlapping by a centimetre in respect to the voussoir above, forming a denticular effect. This type of construction is also found in similar monuments (S. Vittoria of Serri, Predio Canopoli in Perfugas, Su Tempiesu in Orune) and in certain Giants' Tombs (Biristeddi in Dorgali, etc.)

The particularity of the well temple of Santa Cristina is in the grandiosity of the staircase, the beauty of the room and the refined technique with which the nuragic constructors had built it. The walls



Fig. 9. *An aerial view of the nuragic sanctuary of Santa Cristina.*

appear completely smooth; the corners and edges are precise; the steps and the entrance are finely outlined.

The spring water still filters through the interstices to fill the well; the water is particularly copious during autumn and spring, so much so that it fills the well up to the level of the first steps.

It is deplorable that there isn't anything left of the structure above ground, which probably presented a double weathered facade similar to Su Tempiesu in Orune.

The meeting hut

Immediately outside the temenos of the well temple there is a large circular hut with a 10 meter diameter; the residual wall measures 1.70 m. The interior presents a cobblestone floor and a seating area around the perimeter of the wall (width m 0.50; height m 0.30). Although there is no record of any findings in the hut, the large wall seating area supposes a public use of the room: a meeting room where the community that lived in the area could gather and discuss public matters. It is in fact the case of other nuragic villages where precious objects and worship elements had been recovered, like Su Nuraxi in Barumini, Palmavera in Alghero, Santa Vittoria in Serri, Santa Anastasia in Sardara, etc.

Next to the meeting hut there is another smaller round space and a detached enclosing wall that was probably used to keep the animals destined to be offered in sacrifice or maybe given as a compliment to the temple. Unfortunately the unsupervised removal of some of the stones, in particular during the '30s, has mutilated the architecture around the temple. The huts around the well temple have been reduced to a few rows of stones; they comprise only the ruins of circular walls and terraced square shaped spaces*, closed at the top by

*The followings are the dimensions of 10 of the terraced huts, starting from the nearest to the well: **1** (depth m 6.60; width m 4.10/3.30), **2** (depth m 4.18; width m 2.40/2.30), **3** (depth m 4.60; width m 3.10/3.20), **4** (depth m 3.75; width m 3.25), **5** (depth m 3.80; width m 2.55/2.90), **6** (depth m 2.80; width m 3.15), **7** (depth m 3.70; width m 2.20), **8** (depth m 4.45; width m 3.70/2.50), **9** (depth m 3.80; width m 3.35), **10** (depth m 4.50; width m 2.35). The thickness of the walls is between m 0.60 and m 0.80, while the height is limited to few rows of stones.

sloping roofs. These spaces recall similar ruins in Villanovaferri. The spaces in block A are reminiscent of similar ruins in Serrucci-Gonnesa, and especially the ones in the “celebrations grounds” in the Sanctuary of Santa Vittoria of Serri: the terraced disposition of the ruins brings the assumption that they were used for commercial activities in connection with the temple. Unfortunately, the use of the structures and their chronology cannot be defined because of the absence of evidence.



Fig. 10. *An aerial view of the well temple, surrounded by the perimeter wall (temenos).*

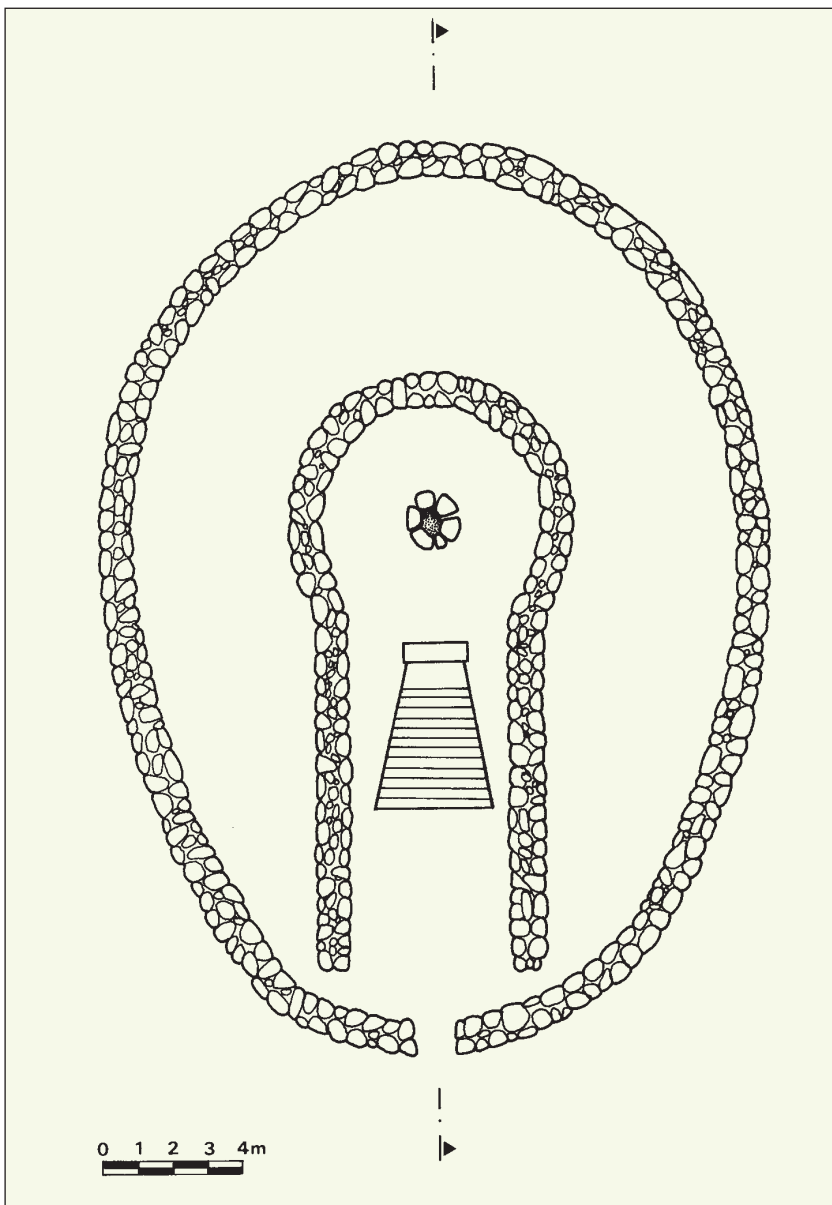


Fig. 11. *Draft of the planimetry of the well temple of Santa Cristina.*

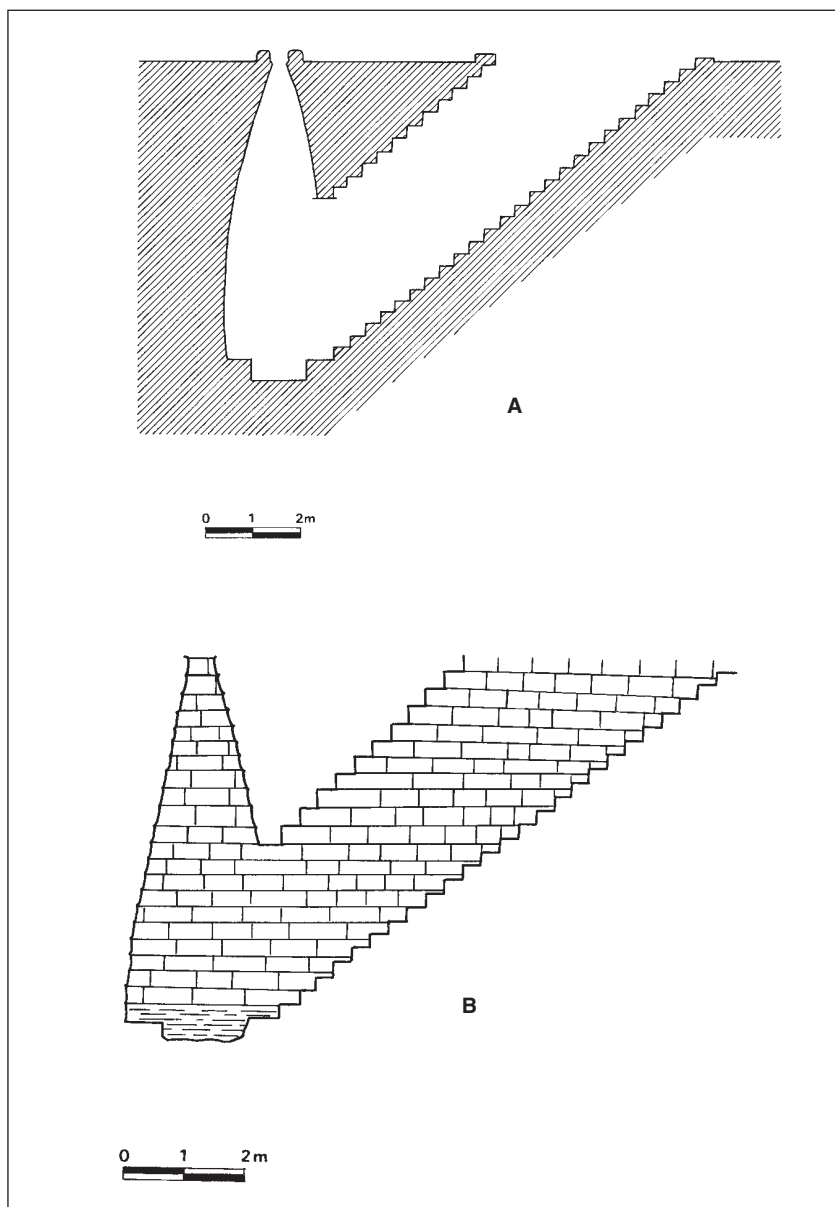


Fig. 12. Sections of the well temple of Santa Cristina by Cavedon (A) and by Lo Schiavo (B).



Fig. 13. *Entrance to the stairs leading down to the underground room.*



Fig. 14. *Ceiling above the staircase.*



Fig. 15. *A view of the stairs from the room underground.*



Fig. 16. *The room seen from the stairs.*



Fig. 17. *The hole in the ground that ends the tholos of the subterranean room to date.*



Fig. 18. *The tholos of the subterranean room with the hole at the summit.*

South-West Sector (C)

The south western sector, about 200 meters away from sector A, comprises the Nuraghe and the ruins of habitations of various periods. There are also some rectangular elongated huts of which we do not know either the use or the age.

The nuraghe Santa Cristina, probably precedent to the well temple, is a modest single tower with a circular base (diameter m 13.00), a staircase, and a room with three recesses forming the shape of a cross. The tower rises up to a maximum height of 6 meters; it was built with roughly cut stones that had been put together without too much care: a construction technique very different from the one employed for the well temple that came later! The circular room (diameter m 3.50) maintains the original ogive vault.

Surrounding the nuraghe there are traces of dwellings, in particu-



Fig. 19. *The “meetings hut”: entrance.*

lar three rectangular huts with rounded edges.

Hut A, placed NW of the nuraghe, still has the whole slab ceiling (length m 13.80; width m 1.30/1.90; height m 1.90/2.10): the main entrance, on the east facing side, is of trapezoidal shape and with architrave (width m 0.85/0.55; height m 1.41), the transversal section is also of trapezoidal shape. About 8 meters from the main entrance, a second (width m 0.45; height m 0.60) opens up at ground level in the side wall to the right; while on the same wall, but raised by m 1.50 and distant m 2.70 from the secondary entrance, there is a small opening that was probably a window (m 0.30 x m 0.20). The wall thickness is between m 0.80 and m 1.35.

Hut B, placed about 5 meters NW from Hut A, has entirely collapsed and therefore it is incomplete (length m 6.80; width m 1.70/1.05; remaining height m 1.00; wall thickness m 1.10).

Hut C is missing the ceiling and it measures m 15.40 by m 3.00/2.50 wide.

Some materials dating back to the Roman Age have been recovered from the excavation of Hut C, both in the ruins of the collapsed ceiling and in the underground layer (Zeppegno-Finzi 1977, p.108 ss.).

They are constructions built after the nuragic period... some are of recent build: huts of this type are present in the whole Paulilatino area in close proximity to nuragic towers (Mura Olia, Galla, Androne, etc.) and especially in the Marghine and in Planargia (Tamuli in Macomer, Mura 'e Bara in Macomer, etc.) where the huts are used to keep animals.

However, for a sure explanation it is necessary to wait for the results of the excavations.

The Church and the *Cumbessias*

After the description of the prehistoric complex, it is important to report some information about the most recent structures that are connected to the religious devotion that has animated the area since the Nuragic Age.

The "recent" religious centre is situated between the two sectors already described. It is of recent build at the expense of some of the nuragic structures and it comprises a small church and 36 cottages



Fig. 20. An aerial view of the “meeting hut” and the surrounding wall (top).



Fig. 21. An aerial view of the terraced huts (focal point); top left, the “meeting hut”.

that in the local language take the name of *muristenes* or *cumbessias**.

* *Muristenes* or *cumbessias* were private houses, or the Church's property, that were built around a church to facilitate the taking part to religious celebrations that took place at night time (particularly the *novena*). The *novena* was celebrated in honour of a Saint and in rural churches distant from inhabited areas. The village people gathered in the church to recite the rosary 9 days before the actual festivity. The *muristenes* or *cumbessias* had been built to facilitate this type of celebration. Whoever could not afford one of these modest houses, used to go to the *novena* every day as part of a procession.

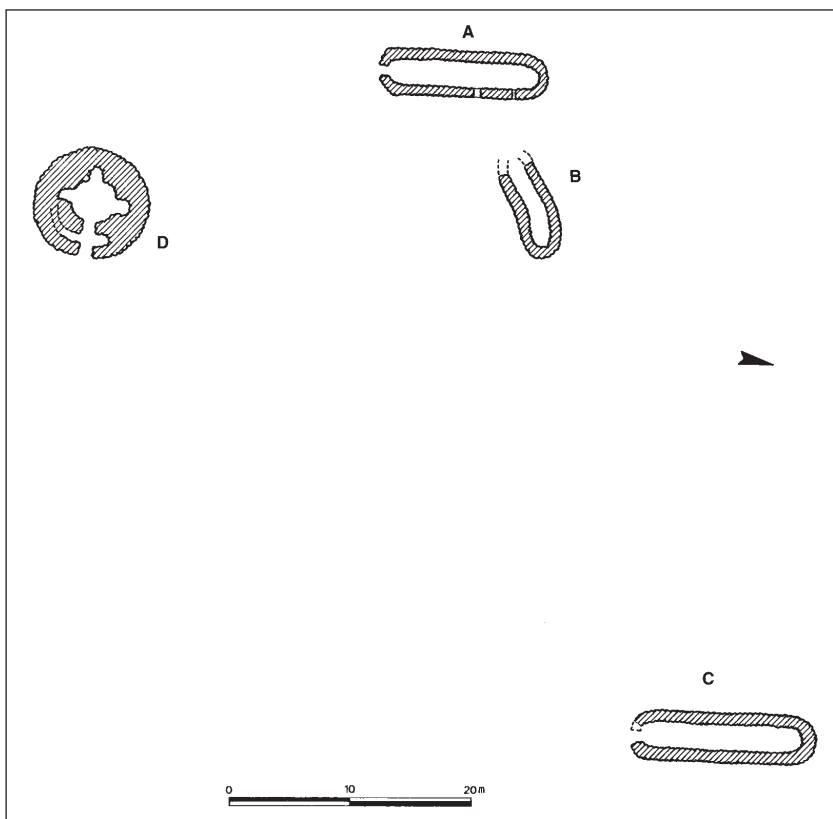


Fig. 22. The Nuraghe with the elongated huts, from the survey by Mackenzie (1913).



Fig. 23. *The Nuraghe Santa Cristina.*

The church of Santa Cristina is recalled in the “Condaghe” (the register of a monastery) of Santa Maria of Bonarcado (CSMB, 18), dating back to the 12th-13th centuries, in which there is a record of a private donation of some land in the location of an ancient village that does not exist anymore by the name of Boele (the name of Paulilatino dates back only as far as the 14th century). The document dates back to the priorate of Greogorio of Bonarcado (between the judgeships of Pietro I and Ugo I) and it testifies to the existence of the church at the beginning of the 13th century. The church was part of the diocese of Santa Giusta; Although close to Paulilatino the church belonged to the Camaldolesi monks of Santa Maria of Bonarcado and it was part of the priorate of Bonarcado: this caused rivalry between the two villages that argued over the parish and the holy relics.

Referring to the rivalry, in 1834 Angius wrote: «The church of Santa Cristina, that is placed in the territory of Paulilatino, is part of this priorate (Bonarcado’s) from which it is two hours away, while the distance from Paulilatino is only a quarter of an hour. There are several small houses for the people attending the *novena*, starting on

the 1st of May. The main festivity follows on the 10th of the same month, when there is a procession to the well temple that is named after the same Saint and is of unique shape and structure.

There is another celebration on the 24th of July in occasion of the commemoration of her glorious death. During this celebration the statue of the Saint is transported on a stretcher followed by a procession of worshippers reciting the rosary; the procession is 4 miles long.

The discussions over the property of the Saint between the inhabitants of Paulilatino and those of Bonarcadu often caused rows, and the cheerfulness ended in tears. If the priests in charge (one from Paulilatino and the other from Bonarcadu) did not intervene to break up the rows, they could have easily ended with some fatalities».

The rivalry between Bonarcadu and Paulilatino only ended in 1914 when before the archbishop of Oristano the church of Santa Cristina was given to the parish of Paulilatino. However they had to pay the sum of 350 lira to the prior of Bonarcadu for the construction of a church dedicated to the same Saint. The people from Bonarcadu had started the building work in 1915, but due to a period of war the



Fig. 24. *Hut A: entrance.*



Fig. 25. *Interior of Hut A.*

works had not been completed until 1928.

In 1926, for the sum of 400 lira a service area had been added to the church, this took the name from the local language *su corrale*. In the same period, the façade was added to the church, which was followed by the restoration of the ceiling, built with cement; in 1977 the cement ceiling was replaced by wooden beams and terracotta tiles.

The little church is formed by one nave, two niches and a bell tower on the façade's left side: however as it stands the building does not keep many original features. The original parts are only the outside lateral walls and the back wall, that have been built with stones of various size and cemented with tiles and ceramic fragments (some dated back to the nuragic age!). At the edges there are basaltic voussoirs, that are probably from the area of the well temple. In the outside, three counterforts lean on the right wall; against the left wall there is a *muristene*, a temporary home for the worshippers. All this leads us to believe that there had been a more ancient building that was destroyed.

Most probably the church of Santa Cristina had originally been built with square voussoirs, that had been reused in the restoration and have now spread all over the construction's walls.

The little church is surrounded by small temporary homes, known in the local language as *muristenes* or *cumbessias*; they are little terraced cottages that have been built around a modest rectangular shaped courtyard, in the local language known as *su corrale*, which shows signs of having been extended from a smaller original version.

On the front of one of these little cottages, there is an inscription that testifies to the year of construction in 1730 and the name of the owner. Other dates take us back to the early 1900's. In the courtyard there is a well protected by an arched lintel.

The well temple in close proximity, according to popular beliefs, had been turned into a prison where the Saint had been tortured.

The legend tells that Santa Cristina was a virgin and a martyr of Bolsena under the empire of Diocletian (IV century), but another local tradition believes that the Saint had been imprisoned in the central tower of the Nuraghe (or the well temple) and then killed, at the time of the war between Paulilatino and Bonarcado.

Yet another legend narrates that the well had been built by orders of Santa Cristina's father to imprison her daughter because she had

become a Christian. While she descended into the prison, as her clothes touched the walls, miraculously they created the offset in the walls around the staircase.

Today, the sanctuary fills up with people in occasion of the festivities in honour of Santa Cristina (second Sunday in May) and in honour of San Raffaele Arcangelo (fourth Sunday in October).



Fig. 26. *The rural church of Santa Cristina.*



Fig. 27. *Santa Cristina: the courtyard with the Cumbessias.*

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Glossary

<i>Aggetto</i>	Closing system typical of the tholos rooms; it is made from rows of stones narrowing progressively, with the top layer slightly overlapping the bottom.
Architrave	Horizontal part of a door frame. In a Nuraghe, it refers to the over head stone slab.
<i>Askos</i>	Narrow neck vase similar to a jug; the water exits from a spout or a tight lip.
Atrium (or vestibule)	Space in front of a construction. In the well temples, it has a square shape, with seating against the walls and leads to the stairs.
<i>Bastione</i>	In a complex Nuraghe construction, it refers to the group of turrets that lean against the main tower.
<i>Betyl</i>	Standing stone believed to be the house of a god.
Betyl-tower	Small pillar made of fashioned stone representing a nuragic tower, believed to have a similar use to the Betilo.
<i>Condaghe</i>	In medieval Sardinia, the “condaghe” was the property register of monasteries where they kept a record of any donations, commercial dealings, farm animals, etc.
<i>Cumbessia</i> (or Muristene)	Small private cottages, or property of the Church, that were built around a church to facilitate the taking part in religious celebrations that

took place at night time. The word might come from *circumvenire* (to come around).

False vault dome	Circular base vault, made from rows of stones built with the “aggetto” system. It is used in rooms inside Nuraghi and in well temples.
Giant’s Tomb	Typical megalithic tomb of the nuragic age, formed by a long body with apsidal base for the burial, which is preceded by a circular area for ceremonial use.
Hypogeum	Underground architecture.
<i>Isodomo</i>	In nuragic architecture, it refers to a construction that is built with fashioned stones put together with great care.
Little temple in antis	Building dating back to the nuragic age, of rectangular shape with elongated side walls that go beyond the entrance’s transversal axis.
<i>Mastio</i>	In nuragic architecture, it refers to the central tower of a complex that is higher than the surrounding turrets (or bastione).
<i>Mensolare</i> (or <i>mensola</i>)	Protruding support made of wood or stone, that encircled the <i>nuraghe</i> at the top with the purpose of holding the terraces of the various towers and courts.
Monolithic	Made from a single block of stone.
Mono-tower	Nuraghe construction with a single tower, also known as simple nuraghe.
<i>Muristene</i> (or <i>cumbessia</i>)	Small private cottages, or property of the Church, that were built around a church to facil-

itate the taking part in religious celebrations that took place at night time. The word might come from *monasterium* (monastery).

Nuraghe

Typical Sardinian construction; the simple form comprises a truncated cone shaped tower with surrounding circular rooms covered by a false vault dome, which is obtained by building the walls with the “aggetto” system. The rooms are interconnecting through a helicoidal staircase inlaid in the wall. The most complex form comprises several towers (between 1 and 5) placed around a simple tower (or *mastio*), that are connected by linear or concave-convex masonry (*cortine*).

Ogive

The arch that follows the profile of the false vault of the room and of the passages in the Nuraghe.

Protonuraghe

(or corridor nuraghe)

Construction of various shapes at the base; they are made mainly by corridors of different shapes and are covered horizontally by large stone slabs. They also have recesses and small rooms, occasionally covered by false vaults.

Rows

Alignment of a row of stones in the masonry.

Tabulare (or ceiling)

In nuragic architecture, it is the covering of the corridors with large stone slabs that were placed horizontally side by side.

Temenos

Surrounding wall of the temple, which divided the sacred area from the profane.

Tholos

Room or circular construction with false vault ceiling obtained from the progressive narrowing

of every circular layer of stones (aggetto).

Trilobato

Nuraghe complex, with the bastione formed by three towers attached by the cortine (linear or concave-convex masonry): usually two towers at the front and one at the back.

Well Temple

Construction dating back to the nuragic age that was used for the worship of water. It includes a vestibule, followed by a staircase leading down to the room underground, that holds the water spring.

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